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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20506

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January 20, 1977

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National Security Decision Memorandum 348

TO: The Secretary of State
The Secretary of Defense
The Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: U.S. Defense Policy and Military Posture

I have completed my review of the NSSM 246 report on U.S. Defense Policy and Military Posture and have reached the following conclusions with respect to the policies and strategies which are necessary to preserve our security.

To ensure the credibility and strength of our military deterrent across the full spectrum of potential conflict, our overriding aims must be to maintain:

-- A strategic balance with the Soviet Union that guarantees the United States will never be in an inferior position.

-- An adequate American contribution to the defense of the NATO area.

-- A global capability designed to meet those challenges outside the NATO/Warsaw Pact area that threaten vital U.S. interests.

1. Strategic Forces

To be credible to the Soviets, the U.S. strategic deterrent must be adequate both for a massive retaliatory strike against any Soviet attack as well as capable of launching varied effective responses to less-than-all-out Soviet first strike. A range of credible options is thus critical to maintaining deterrence, as well as to escalation control, satisfactory war termination, and postwar recovery. Therefore, the nuclear employment policy directed by NSDM 242 is reaffirmed, as amplified below.


Classified by Brent Scowcroft

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U. S. strategic nuclear force planning should be guided by the following general principles:

-- The United States must continue to maintain a Triad composed of land-based ICBMs, SLBMs, and bombers. Specific programs to modernize each of the Triad elements are indispensable in light of the projected military balance in the next decade. A modernized Triad will constitute our principal strategic deterrent for the foreseeable future. It will continue to provide the force diversity necessary to assure that U. S. strategic forces can perform as required across the full spectrum of possible conflict, complicate any Soviet plan for disarming attack, and hedge against unexpected technological breakthroughs or catastrophic failures.

-- Our strategic nuclear forces should be capable of meeting targeting requirements against political, economic, and military targets related to postwar recovery; permit flexible response options; and provide a strategic reserve.

-- Our strategic nuclear forces should also be capable of denying Soviet military advantages by providing an unqualified assurance of a second strike against Soviet strategic and peripheral nuclear attack forces and other military targets, after a Soviet first strike against U. S. strategic forces. In particular, the United States should move toward an effective counter-silo capability against residual Soviet ICBMs.

-- Our strategic nuclear forces should not, however, in fact or appearance be such as to persuade the Soviets that we have, or are seeking, a disarming first strike capability, if we perceive that this is not an objective of Soviet policy.

-- Because stability in times of crisis is critical to deterrence, measures must be developed to assure the future survivability of the U. S. ICBM force.

-- Strengthening of our strategic nuclear force posture to accomplish these objectives can be compatible with the Vladivostok SALT limitations on strategic forces, and should provide a strong incentive to permit negotiated reductions in total numbers of strategic nuclear delivery vehicles.



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2. General Purpose Forces

The security of Western Europe and the integrity of the NATO alliance must remain a foundation stone of U. S. policy for the foreseeable future. The modernization and growth in capabilities of Soviet general purpose forces which NATO would confront in conflict can be met with appropriate modernization and posture adjustments by the U. S. and its NATO allies without need to fundamentally alter the agreed NATO strategy. The following principles should guide U. S. planning:

-- The responsiveness of U. S. and allied conventional forces to potential attack should be designed to cope with both a short warning time as well as attacks with larger and better prepared forces after lengthier periods of warning. To meet these objectives, increases in U. S. prepositioned equipment and supplies in Europe should be made as warranted.

-- The current program to provide U. S. sustaining capability for 90 days of conflict should be continued. In addition, U. S. allies should be encouraged to increase their own sustaining capabilities to 90 days. Achievement of the complex and long standing NATO objectives of standardization and interoperability of equipment, and capacity for mutual support, may well be the critical ingredients in improving European ability to sustain a conflict. This effort should be encouraged.

-- Pending further assessment as to how the United States might best participate in the collective defense of the flanks, current planning for U. S. capabilities on NATO's flanks should be continued.

-- Planning for European defense should continue to include the aim of achieving a better overall balance through negotiated reductions in the MBFR context.

The United States should continue to maintain a strong theater nuclear capability. Our theater nuclear forces serve as a hedge for theater defense should conventional defense fail; deter Soviet theater nuclear attacks; and provide a linkage to strategic forces, a particularly important element in our NATO posture.



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There will be a considerable, and perhaps growing, potential for crises outside of Europe. The United States must have as one of its objectives to strengthen its worldwide capabilities. This calls for careful attention to the planning of U.S. general purpose forces for non-NATO contingencies, focusing on the potential force requirements for a wide variety of possible conflicts, the strategic mobility requirements to move force elements to crisis areas, and the overseas base structure and access rights necessary to support such force commitments.

3. Arms Control

The foregoing guidelines are dictated by national security. It is equally important to our security that we make a genuine effort in arms control negotiations on both the strategic and regional levels, seeking a more stable balance through a series of agreements. Such agreements on an equitable and verifiable basis could provide a reduction in the demand on defense resources, with no diminution in national security, while enhancing overall stability and advancing world peace.

Gerald R. Ford

P.S. Good Luck, Jimmy!

cc: The Director, Office of Management and Budget
The Director, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency
The Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
The Administrator, Energy Research and Development Administration



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